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ABSTRACT

The 1988 Civics Objectives Assessment is the fourth such assessment since the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) program was initiated in 1969. It outlines the objectives and framework for assessing U.S. civics programs at grades 4, 8, and 12. This outline includes provision for assessment in terms of content, context and cognition. Outlines of the content include: (1) rights, responsibilities and the law; (2) political processes; (3) political institutions (structure and function); and (4) democratic principles and the purpose of governments. The context, or level, for assessing these principles, are the home, school, community, state, nation, and world; content is to be assessed at increasing levels of context at increasing grade levels. Cognitive objectives are knowledge of the content, and understanding and application of the content of citizenship and participation in political processes. The booklet also elaborates on the areas of content that are included in the assessment, and lists the members of the NAEP civics advisory committees and the development consultants and reviewers who participated in the development of the Civics Objectives for 1988. (JGL)

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CIVICS: UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT & POLITICS OBJECTIVES

1988 ASSESSMENT

SEPTEMBER 1987

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Introduction & overview

The Development Process

Since 1969, The Nation's Report Card, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), has been responsible for collecting information about the educational achievement of our nation's youth in a variety of subject areas. These areas have included reading, mathematics, writing, science, music, art, literature, computer competence, social studies, and citizenship. Civics was first measured in the context of the 1969-70 Citizenship assessment, again in the 1974-75 Citizenship assessment, and a third time in 1981-82 as part of a combined assessment of citizenship and social studies. The objectives contained in this booklet represent a modification of some of the 1981-82 Citizenship objectives and additional objectives which reflect current trends in civics education.*

The new statement was developed by NAEP's Learning Area and State Advisory Committees and has been reviewed extensively by teachers, curriculum specialists, and school administrators to ensure that the assessment topics do not diverge substantially from current instructional practice or expectations. All of the contributors and reviewers were selected to reflect the perspectives of peo-

*_Citizenship and Social Studies Objectives: 1981-82 Assessment_ (Booklet No. 13-CS-10). Denver CO: National Assessment of Educational Progress, Education Commission of the States.

ple in various sizes and types of communities, from many geographic regions, and from a variety of racial/ethnic groups.

This final statement does not necessarily reflect the views of every individual who participated in the development and review processes, but presents, as accurately as possible, the consensus reached.

The Assessment of Civics: United States Government and Politics

The assessment of civics will take place during the Bicentennial of the writing of the United States Constitution, the oldest written national constitution in the world. Participation in the government of the United States by all individuals is what forms a democracy—our government is of, by, and for the people. To endure, a democracy relies on the ability and willingness of its citizens to be involved intelligently in political and public affairs at all levels: local, state, national, and international.

The broad purpose of including U.S. government and civics in school curricula is to prepare students to reflect on and participate in the political decision-making processes of our society. Understanding democratic principles will help students appreciate and exercise their rights as well as recognize the responsibilities inherent in being a United States citizen. Studying the structure of our government, the functions of its three branches, and the political processes by which decisions are made will enable students to participate more fully and effectively as informed citizens.

The Objectives Framework for Civics: United States Government and Politics

A three-dimensional matrix made up of Content, Context, and Cognition outlines the broad objectives for civics education. Figure 1 presents the matrix and shows how each

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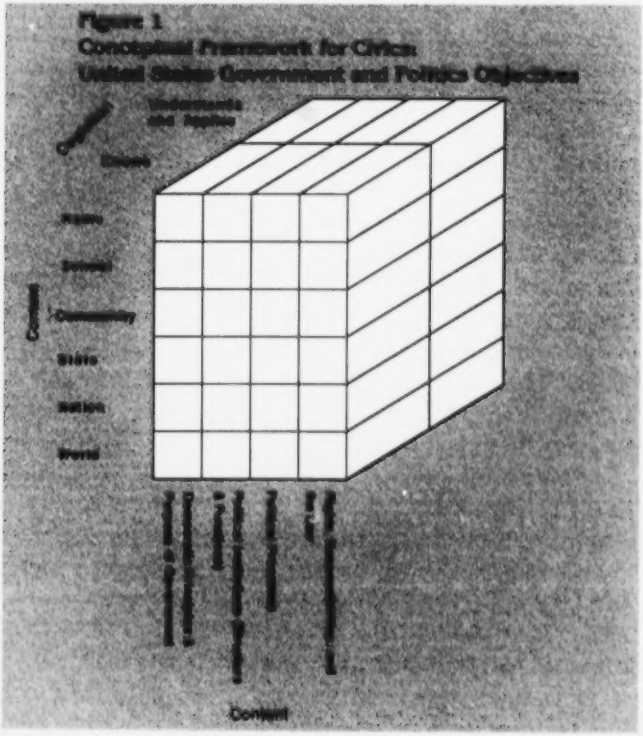
dimension is divided into major categories. Each exercise in the assessment can be classified within the matrix by matching the category of content it assesses, the context in which the question is asked, and the cognitive skill it measures.

Together, these dimensions help define the major objectives of United States civics education and provide guidelines for developing questions to assess students at age 9/grade 4, age 13/grade 8, and age 17/grade 12. This conceptual framework and the objectives themselves may be useful to curriculum developers in their own considerations of scope and priorities at state and local levels.



Objective one

Context

The development of political awareness begins in early childhood and continues throughout adolescence and adulthood. Expectations for what children at the various age and grade levels can understand will increase as they mature and are better able to comprehend abstract values, recognize democratic principles, apply their knowledge by participating in the decision-making structures of groups to which they belong, and develop an awareness of and interest in public affairs.

Learning and applying the principles of civics begins in the home and in early social interactions with friends, relatives, and members of the community. This learning process continues in school as children interact with classmates, teachers, and school administrators and learn about rules, accepted behaviors, and basic democratic principles, not only those employed in school elections, but also those involved in daily decision-making activities.

As they move through school, students gain familiarity with the numerous guidelines established for group interactions in the home, school, and for outside-of-school activities. They also learn in greatly varying degrees about local, state, and national laws. Ideally, they become more actively involved in decision-making processes related to home and school issues and come to understand the consequences of the decisions they make and how the decisions made by others may influence their own lives.

They also become more aware of how guidelines and laws may affect different groups of people in different ways and gain further understanding of abstract ideas such as freedom, responsibility, justice, and human rights.

The contexts of state, nation, and the world are rarely the immediate sources of students' experiences, because they offer less opportunity for direct participation. However, these three contexts tend to be the foci of instruction during the middle and high school years and are frequently discussed on television and in newspapers and magazines. Knowledge about the government and laws of the United States and some degree of comparative perspective are necessary in order for students to develop a deep appreciation of U.S. political and constitutional values, and an understanding of the global contexts for U.S. political, social, cultural, intellectual, and economic development.

The content objectives that appear on the following pages can only be considered appropriate for all three age/grade levels assessed by NAEP if one accounts for students' understanding of civics in each of these contexts. The broad view of civics, which encompasses understanding these principles in family units as well as in the global community, widens the content beyond that typically found only in high-school texts and provides a basis for assessing students across three age/grade levels.

Objective two

Cognition

For the purposes of this assessment, cognitive skills have been divided into two major categories: *knows* and recognizes factual information and *understands and applies* information that has been learned. All of the questions developed for the assessment can be assigned to one of these basic categories.

Knows. This dimension primarily refers to recognizing factual knowledge. Effective citizenship depends on the ability to recall specific facts and concepts, to show familiarity with relevant terminology, and to recognize basic procedures and ideas.

Understands and applies. This dimension involves the ability to interpret information and to be aware of how concepts, facts, and principles are interrelated. The higher level cognitive operations involved in understanding civics and practicing good citizenship are essentially evaluative. They require students to examine their own views, to determine the validity of information and arguments, and to make judgments and decisions based on the comparative merit of available alternatives. This judgment often must take into account the congruence of the resulting consequences of decisions with the basic values of democracy.

Finally, students must understand how to work within the organized frameworks of laws and governmental pro-

cesses to promote or protect their own or others' interests and values. The goal of broad-based and informed political participation hinges on citizens' ability and willingness to examine issues and take action consistent with democratic principles.

Objective three

Content

Democratic Principles and The Purpose of Government

It is important that students understand the principles underlying the organization and operation of the United States government. It is equally as important that prominent among these democratic principles are the consent of the governed and the basic rights of individuals, which derive from historical precedent, and, to some extent, are set forth in the United States Constitution. Students also should understand that the context within which these principles are to be applied can change and that various political principles have been interpreted differently during different periods of history. Further, some degree of comparative perspective with other countries is necessary for adequate understanding of U.S. political and constitutional values, American social and economic institutions, and patterns of U.S. political, social, intellectual, and economic development.

Political Institutions (Structure and Functions)

Students should know the central historical facts related to the development of the United States political system, and its basic organizing principles such as federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances. They

also should understand the structure and operation of the three branches of United States government as well as the policies that are the responsibilities, respectively, of the federal, state, and local governments.

Political Processes

Students need to gain an understanding of the range and importance of the decisions made by government. They should understand the processes involved in governmental decision-making and what influences these processes. An awareness of elections, other forms of political participation, and the roles of interest groups and political parties is also essential.

Rights, Responsibilities, and the Law

Students need to know the specific rights and liberties guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. They should also understand how judicial decisions are made and how the judicial system operates. Students should understand the purposes of laws and the responsibility of citizens to comply with these laws. Finally, young Americans should recognize that constitutional rights and freedoms extend to all persons and that every individual has a responsibility to promote equal opportunity.

Assessment topics

The NAEP Learning Area and State Advisory committees did not intend that the following listing of topics be considered complete or definitive or that any single curriculum should include all topics described in these pages. They were, however, deemed to be of central importance to teaching objectives in the fields of civics and government and served to guide the development of questions for the assessment. Because of time constraints and other limitations inherent in any assessment, NAEP cannot include questions measuring all possible objectives. Consequently, the final selection of items for the assessment will demand a careful balancing of the following requirements:

- ★the need to repeat enough questions from previous assessments to be able to report on changes in performance over time,
- ★the need to meet distribution specifications with respect to content, context, and cognition, and
- ★the need to provide items of varying difficulty.

Within these constraints, the choice among questions was based on professional judgments about the quality of individual items and the relative importance of what each measures.

Finally, NAEP consultants did not intend to imply that the various objectives are equally relevant or appropriate for assessment at the three age/grade levels. They emphasized that questions should be set in the appropri-

ate contextual situations and that special attention should be given to developing items appropriate to students' language skills and cognitive sophistication.

I. **Democratic Principles and the Purpose of Government**

A. Understanding the basic principles and ideas expressed or implied in the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, court decisions, and laws. These principles include representative government based on the consent of the governed, basic rights such as freedom of expression and belief, freedom from arbitrary governmental actions, equality of opportunity, the rule of law, limited government, and federalism.

B. Understanding the purpose of government and comprehending the development of our political system. Greek democracy, Roman laws, European Enlightenment, and English common law are among the major historical antecedents.

C. Understanding the various interpretations of basic political principles in different periods of United States history. For example, the interpretation of the concept of equality has changed over the last one hundred years, and the principle of judicial review has developed from an earlier concept in our political history.

D. Understanding the changes in definition and interpretation over time of constitutional values and principles.

E. Knowing the basic differences between the political system in the United States and those in other nondemocratic nations by comparing and contrasting principles and purposes, the decision-making processes, and the roles of political parties.

II. **Political Institutions (Structure and Functions)**

A. Knowing basic historical facts about the development of the United States political system, including the contributions of American and European political thinkers, the purposes of major documents and doctrines, the significance of our nation's symbols, important legislative acts and judicial cases, and the political consequences of economic, political, and social change.

B. Understanding the organizational principles of the United States government, which include federalism, limited government with individual rights, majority rule, popular sovereignty, separation of powers, and checks and balances.

C. Understanding the structure and operation of the three branches of American government—legislative, executive, and judicial.

D. Understanding historical changes in the roles of various levels and branches of government. Such changes have involved the functions and power of the President, the United States Congress, the United States Supreme Court, the development and power of regulatory agencies and the civil service, and the responsibilities of federal and state government.

E. Understanding the organization and functions of state and local governments and their relationships to each other and the federal government.

III. **Political Processes**

A. Understanding the range and importance of decisions made by the various branches of the federal

government, including independent regulatory agencies. Familiarity with the following kinds of examples is expected: Congress passes a law establishing a minimum wage; the President approves a tax bill passed by Congress; the Supreme Court interprets a case concerning the death penalty; the United States Department of Justice decides whether or not two large steel companies may merge; the United States Department of Defense awards contracts for the weapons needed for national defense; the Internal Revenue Service decides to audit a person's taxes.

B. Understanding the range and importance of decisions made by state and local governments. Examples include: a local government decides to widen a street and assess property holders for the cost; a state decides to increase a highway user tax; a local school board decides to cut back on extracurricular activities because of budget problems; a state decides to grant property-tax relief.

C. Understanding the interdependence of decisions made by the various branches and levels of government. Examples include decisions about highway and road construction and their maintenance.

D. Understanding the limits on decision-making powers of the government. These include: constitutional constraints such as due process; the system of checks and balances; political constraints, such as the impact of public opinion and various interest groups; and practical constraint's such as the cost and time needed to carry out legislation.

E. Understanding influences on governmental decision-making. These include litigation, public opinion and special-interest-group lobbying, voter

blocs, the media, personal prestige and appeal, political party work and contributions, and political bargaining.

F. Understanding the formal legislative process, including sponsorship of bills, introduction of bills, the United States House of Representatives and United States Senate committee meetings, passage of legislation, and the President's veto power.

G. Understanding legislative and judicial decision-making. Changes may be accomplished through the application of statutes, through public opinion and politics, by setting precedents of case law, and by the amendment process.

H. Understanding how conflicts in laws or principles are resolved by comparing statutes and by applying case law and constitutional principles.

I. Understanding the limitations of formal legal processes in settling disputes, including differences in legal expertise, cost, and delays.

J. Understanding the role and structure of political parties.

K. Understanding the role of interest groups and Political Action Committees (PACs).

L. Understanding the formation and impact of public opinion polls.

M. Understanding procedures for filling political offices, including appointment, election, nomination, and primaries at the local, state, and federal level.

N. Understanding initiative, referendum, and recall.

IV. Rights, Responsibilities, and the Law

A. Understanding specific rights and liberties guaranteed by the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and state constitutions, and that these extend to all persons. These include citizenship, due process, equal protection, the right to bear arms, free speech, freedom of the press, and exercise of religion.

B. Recognizing that rights have many sources and can be created by legislative and administrative actions.

C. Recognizing the differing functions of civil and criminal law and understanding how judicial decisions are made.

D. Understanding factors that might affect justice, such as publicity, economic status or condition, social status, national origin, race, gender, inadequate counsel, bias of jury or judge, arbitrary sentencing, prison conditions, and location of trial.

E. Recognizing the provision for national defense, including the authority of Congress under the Constitution to provide for the common defense, declare war, raise and support armies, provide and maintain a navy, as well as the designation of the President to serve as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy.

F. Knowing the constitutional rights of criminal defendants. These include the right to counsel, the right to call defense witnesses and to testify in one's own behalf, freedom from illegal searches and seizures, coercive interrogation, freedom from cruel and unusual punishment, the right against self-incrimination, freedom from double jeopardy,

and a citizen's responsibility to assist with law enforcement, which includes notifying authorities about a crime.

G. Knowing the duties and responsibilities of participants in the judicial system. For example: It is the duty of jurors to consider evidence heard in court and to evaluate it by appropriate standards; the duty of the judge, to determine the law, maintain order, and ensure fairness; the lawyer's duty, to represent defendants; the district attorney's, to prosecute the defendant in the interest of justice.

H. Understanding the laws that provide equal opportunities in areas of daily life such as politics, housing, education, employment, and recreation.

I. Recognizing situations in which rights have been denied to various groups and those individuals who work to protect and uphold those rights. These may include denial of the right to vote; censorship of the press; discrimination based on race, national origin, religion, gender, age, social status, or political views; illegal search, arrest, or detention; denial of legal assembly to protest; and denial of a fair or speedy trial.

J. Understanding that an individual's rights may conflict with those of another individual or with the general welfare. Illustrative cases may be: the right of an owner to select tenants versus the right to housing without discrimination; the right of people to assemble versus laws protecting the public from excessive disruptions; and freedom of the press versus the right to a fair trial.

K. Understanding the purposes of law in a democratic society, which include protecting individual and group rights, liberties, safety, order, and prop-

erty; defining punishment; preserving social and political institutions; providing guidelines for social and political change; redressing grievances; providing rules for economic and social relationships; and providing a basis for resolution of conflicts.

L. Understanding the dynamic nature of the legal system, including enactment of new laws and interpretation of existing laws.

M. Recognizing the individual's responsibility to respect legitimate authority, and to comply with local, state, and federal laws such as those related to taxes, employment, licensing, and driving.

N. Recognizing the right to dissent in legitimate ways from wrongful laws and arbitrary authority. This may entail calling attention to specific injustice by discussion, appeals to authority, letters, petitions, protests, and even in some cases, by nonviolent civil disobedience, and by using constitutional methods to change or repeal laws, policies, and decisions that are unworkable or unjust.

O. Exercising the responsibility of democratic citizenship by being well-informed and encouraging participation in school, community, state, and national affairs.

Participants in the development process

The National Assessment appreciates the efforts of all of the individuals who contributed to the development of the 1988 Civics Objectives. Many educators, including university professors, history and social science researchers, classroom teachers, school administrators, and curriculum specialists, as well as concerned parents and lay persons, participated in developing and reviewing successive drafts. These objectives could not have been developed without their substantial involvement. The National Assessment wishes to extend its gratitude to all participants.

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